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# Language Strategies of the Enlightenment: the Image of ‘Poland’ in French Napoleonic Press

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In this article, we reconstructed a generalized image of Poland and Poles within the framework of the multidisciplinary concept of “mental mapping”. The most popular daily newspaper of Napoleon’s time “*Journal de l’Empire*” (1804–1814) used distinctive linguistic markers of the Enlightenment to depict Poland and its inhabitants in French society, such as, “civilization”, “barbarity”, “culture”, “tradition” (“religion”), “childhood of nation”. Content analysis has been applied as an auxiliary method to the press sources which allowed to determine the nature and the impact of political propaganda on the public imagination.

**KEYWORDS:** Poland; France; image; representation; mental mapping; Enlightenment; language; civilization; barbarity; culture; tradition

## 1. Introduction

In our studies of the past, interdisciplinary approaches are becoming more and more popular. The concept of “mental mapping” is one of such approaches, and it considers spatial representations of individuals and social groups. Classic studies include Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (Pantheon Books, 1978), Maris Todorova’s *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 1997), Ezekiel Adamovsky’s *Euro-Orientalism: Liberal Ideology and the Image of Russia in France (c. 1740–1880)* (Peter Lang, 2006), James Carrier’s *Occidentalism. Images of the West* (Clarendon Press, 1995), Iver Neumann’s *Uses of the Other. The “East” in European*

*Identity Formation* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999) and a number of others.

Listed above scholars admit accordingly that language plays an important role in formation of the image of “other” (negative, hyperbolic characteristics are attributed to the category of “other”, while positive to the opposite term of “self”). During the Enlightenment Era, Eastern Europe and Poland, in particular, were examples of “other” for the French. In this context, we need to mention, that Enlightenment ended with a fall of the last regime of the French Revolution – Napoleon Empire. We do not intend to conduct a detailed analysis of the linguistic aspects of the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, yet we will concentrate only on relevant for the given study characteristics, which were attributed to the image of Poland by the French.

One of the most important phenomena, which had distinct socio-cultural connotations, was civilization and barbarism (Терин, 2003). These dichotomic phenomena were attributed not only to the descriptions of Poland but also to the whole Eastern Europe and Russia (McLean, 2012; Adamovsky, 2006; 2005). Synonymous to barbarism characteristic was a traditional nature of the society, not only in cultural terms (religiosity) but also in its socio-economic relations (equality/inequality of social statuses). Also, the distinctive quality was a description of a certain nation as being in a state of “birth” or “childhood” (Adamovsky, 2005). Due to this, barbarism and civilization, the traditional nature of the society, the childhood and youth of the nation – all are examples of the language of the Enlightenment, that was used to describe Poland.

In this article, we reconstruct the image of Poland during the Napoleonic wars using “*Journal de l’Empire*” – everyday Paris newspaper during 1804–1814. Such reconstruction can be considered as the main task of this study, which will be based not only on materials of the newspaper but also on a certain historical context, which, in particular, involves the description of the source and partial Polish influence on the content.

## 2. Government Regulation of Media and Characteristic of the Source: “Journal de l’Empire”

Even though we analyze only one newspaper, we have to take into account general approach of Napoleon’s administration to the media. It was Napoleon I, who was one of the first in the history of statesmen, who understood the importance of influencing the public opinion. The emperor received daily a newsletter from the secret police, in which the “public spirit” section (in French *esprit publique*) was a compulsory element. He believed that information should be presented to the general public in such a way as to create clearly defined stereotypes in the society that should be beneficial to the authority. It was this vision that affected his media policy (Тарле, 1958, 502–514).

The strict government policy relative to the media began when Napoleon came to power on 18 Brumaire in the year VIII of the Republic (9 November 1799). It’s worth remembering that the Constitution of 1799 was passed not by the legislature, but by members of the constitutional commission. There was no Declaration of Human Rights and Citizens in this document, which is very important in the context of our study, since there were a part about the freedom of speech and press. Newspapers had no longer that constitutional right.

Since that time 60 of the 73 newspapers were closed. Others were not closed but fell under the partial control of the government, as itself was the shareholder. This control was realized under the jurisdiction of the authorities of the departments in which these newspapers were published (Тарле, 1958, 505). In 1810 the post of “Chief Director” was established and his direct supervisor was the Minister of the Interior Affairs, whose duties included control over everything related to the printing and book trade. The same document regulated the number of typographies in Paris – 60, in departments this number also was fixed (Тарле, 1958, 507). In a few years Napoleon was, therefore, legally in control of the press and the printing industry.

The press during the First Empire can be described as being forced to fulfill government orders. Napoleon I believed that newspapers were [are] obliged not only to remain silent when government required, but to speak exclusively in those terms in which it would be permitted by (Тарле, 1958,

493). The emperor, in particular, about the “Journal de l’Empire” said that the newspaper should not give any accurate data, it should serve as an instrument for increasing the glory of French troops who are fighting abroad (Тарле, 1958, 495).

“Journal de l’Empire” was used to express the official position of Napoleon and his associates, as the government was among shareholders. The Newspaper had 24 shares, 8 of which belonged to the government (Тарле, 1958, 511). It is also important to mention that in this newspaper “Bulletin de la Grande-Armée” was regularly published, in which the success of the army of Napoleon and emperor’s plans were described. This confirms a partial influence of the government on the content (bulletins were also published by “Le Moniteur universel”).

Another important feature of the source is that it influenced formation of the public opinion. This proves the fact that it was most common among readers (other largest newspapers: “Gazette de France”, “Petites Affiches”, “Journal de Paris”) and in 1813 had 1 488 856 francs in assets. Also, in 1813, the profit for each share amounted to 21 833 francs, and the total amount of the profit from the subscription was 1 459 346 francs, which is two to three times the profit of competitive publications (Тарле, 1958). This is the reason why this newspaper can be a source of the analysis of the image of Poland created by the government on the pages of this newspaper for its readers.

Using the content-analysis (Stemler, 2015) as a method, in the context of studying the image of Poland, we analyzed more than 1000 newspaper articles. According to the subjects of the notes, we divided the reconstruction of the image into certain aspects: “Discovery”: Geography and History, Culture and Society, Uprising.

### **3. Image: “Discovery”: Geography and History**

Obviously, the French knew about existence of such a state as Poland. For example, in 1573 Henry III was elected as a king of Poland, and the Polish kings Vladislav IV Vaza and Jan II Kazimir Vaza were married to a French duchess – these and other dynastic ties were common until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Despite this, during the Napoleonic era, the French knew little

about Poland as a country and about its population. That is why we consider it appropriate to describe, so to speak, the “discovery” of Poland as a country.

Particular interest in Poland developed, according to the content analysis (chart №1) during military campaigns of Napoleon in 1807, 1809 and 1812, when the French army was in this region.

After the divisions of Poland (1772, 1793, 1795), this country could not be distinguished from the states that divided it, and served [as] a mere territorial platform for the deployment of troops. In the beginning of 1805–1806, Poland was not represented as a separate country, it was an integral part of Russian and Austrian Empires, Prussia (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1805, 07 Décembre). We draw this conclusion based on the first news about Poland, which was placed in the context of Prussia and Russia (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 07 Janvier).

Poland became detached in November 28, 1806, when in the section of *Nouvelles étrangères* (Foreign news) of the newspaper a separate piece about Poland appeared. This might have happened to justify the campaign of 1807, which undoubtedly had already been developed – and although it

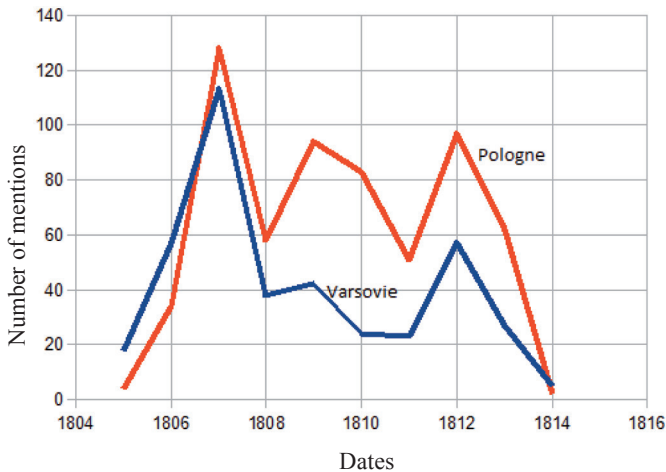


Chart №1

(keywords: Pologne, Varsovie, Grand-Duché de Varsovie)

is difficult to say how much Napoleon I was thinking of the Parisians, the time of the texts speaks for itself.

In general, in France during 1806–1808, interest in the history and geography of Poland is increasing. For example, books about this country started to be published (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1806, 12 Novembre). Prominent geographers and historians of that time were studying Poland. We see the publication of fragments of Claude Carloman de Rulhière *The history of anarchy in Poland and the dismemberment of this republic* (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 11 Mars; 1807, 20 Mars). Also, texts of a famous geographer Conrad Malte-Brun began to appear.

Notably, when Napoleon’s troops reached Poland, Malte-Brun, on the request from the government, wrote a study entitled *Picture of Poland*.<sup>1</sup> The texts of his authorship were periodically published in the newspaper, among which *A few remarks about Poland* (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 29 Janvier), *A quick look at the causes of Poland’s fall* [misprint in the original: instead of Pologne – Cologne], and *History of Poland from its formation until 1795* written by the former Lieutenant General Komarzhhevsky (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 28 Février). One of the Malte-Brun articles in 1812 describes the geography and population of Poland, where the latter is characterized as a multinational country inhabited by Poles, Ukrainians or Little Russians, Lithuanians; in the same text we find information about cold climate in Poland; and a separate part devoted to the history, preceding the divisions (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1812, 17 Juillet).

Since 1807, we see that the image is being constructed of a cold and harsh state (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 07 Janvier), a country of forests and marshes, located somewhere on the frontiers between Russia and Prussia (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 24 août). But the borders of Poland look uncertain, there are no geographical references, we read about cities only briefly (about Warszawa, Poznań, Lviv, Zamość and some others). Generally, Poland is depicted as an unfavorable region, where cold has become the cause of illnesses in the army (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1808, 25 Février).

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<sup>1</sup> French: *Tableau de la Pologne*.

#### **4. Image: Culture and Society**

In the articles of the newspaper, the main cultural characteristic of the Poles is their religion – the importance of the Roman Catholic rite, which accompanied all the celebrations. This was interesting for French because after the Revolution they did not consider religion such an important part of culture. Despite the fact that Napoleon signed a concordat with Rome in 1801 and was crowned in 1804, from a textual analysis it is clear that the authors did not quite understand why rites were so tied to the state celebrations (“*Journal de l’Empire*”, 1806, 23 Décembre; 1807, 21 Janvier; 1807, 25 Mai).

The importance of not only rites, but also parishes in Poland’s public life were described [showed] in one of the articles in which we read: “the distribution in the villages works in the native language or instructions of believers in the churches is necessary to take advantage of the opportunity to restore ancient independence and elect a king of their choice” (“*Journal de l’Empire*”, 1805, 04 Décembre). This note shows that the calls for the restoration of independence, which was beneficial for the French government, had to begin with the distribution of propaganda among the parishioners (Ададуров, 2017).

In the context of culture, we should take into consideration [mention] another important characteristic of the Enlightenment era – the level of “civilization” in the country. In 1807, Conrad Malte-Brun writes that in Poland “the remnants of civilization and wealth sharply contrasted with misery, anarchy, and ignorance of their neighbors” (“*Journal de l’Empire*”, 1807, 24 août). The next mention about “civilization” we see only in 1812, alongside with the description of Russia. In an 1812 article, Poland is opposed to Russia, and is depicted as one that stands higher as a civilization – as Poland expanded its borders and repulsed its territory of the Tatars, while they still occupied Russia (“*Journal de l’Empire*”, 1812, 18 novembre). In general, from the articles in 1808, 1810, 1811 and 1812, the civilization of Poland relates more to the past rather than to the present state of the country. Absence of an independent state led to a discourse about the declination of civilization in Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which eventually led to the collapse of the country.

We find little information about the social structure of the society. Nevertheless, from the first articles about Poland, we can see that focus was

on *szlachta* (gentry) (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1806, 17 Décembre; 1807, 02 Octobre), who supported Napoleon’s plans for Poland. Another interesting point is the appeal of Polish *magnates* to Napoleon with the request to leave the right of servitude for another forty years (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 02 Octobre), which demonstrates preservation of the inequality on Polish lands. Only in 1812, we see that other strata of the population began to be mentioned: “people rise all over Poland. The White Eagle raised everywhere. Priests, nobles, peasants, women – all demand the independence of their nation” (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1812, 24 Juillet.)

A division of the society into different strata is also evident in various characteristics of *szlachta* and peasants. The latter is described as barbarians with rough habits (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 24 août), that engage in farming. *Szlachta*, on the other hand, is depicted as a relatively “civilized” group of people who are fighting for the independence of their country (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1806, 17 Décembre). The Poles in 1807 are described as those who have: “the seeds of good rule – they preserved the spirit and customs of the Scythians and Sarmatians. [...] There is progress that would make us treat them not as barbarians” (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 24 Août). From this text by Conrad Malte-Brun, the Poles remain somewhere on the verge of civilization and barbarism. This thesis is confirmed by A. Forest’s research, in which he notes that for a Western European who was accustomed to a developed urban culture, everything east of the Elbe is barbarism (Фопсепт, 2012).

Another important feature that was attributed to Poland is the “ancient state”. This was done probably to justify the necessity of an uprising against Russia and Prussia for restoration of independence. In a text from 1807 we read an anonymous authorship’s enthusiastically writing about the former Constitution of Poland and emphasizing existence of the *liberum veto* which the Polish gentry or their delegates had (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1807, 25 Mai). Antiquity is also mentioned in the context of the *Picture of Poland* by Malte-Brun, where he describes ancient origins of the government institutions in Poland.

At the same time with antiquity we find an opposite description regarding “nation” and “historical inevitability” of the existence of a separate Polish state. Among a number of articles we find a statement, that seems interesting for the French to observe “events of childhood and youth



of nations” (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1812, 22 Juillet) (it is one of the examples of the Enlightenment lexicon after Adamovsky). This demonstrates the inconsistency of the authors of the newspaper: in 1806 and 1807 we read about appeals to the country’s ancient roots, what was used to justify the need for support from France, but in 1812 it is about “the birth of a nation”, although its existence was proclaimed by the emperor back in 1806 (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1806, 12 Décembre).

The change in rhetoric from the “ancient nation” to the “birth of a nation”, which took place roughly in 1812, can be explained by the periods before and after the significant defeats of the French troops. In the beginning, the government had to justify its intervention in the affairs of other states, so it was necessary to show why Poland deserved to be independent and why France had to help. After the defeat of the French troops in Russia in 1812, the rhetoric of the newspaper has changed, now the French have been given the opportunity to take part in the creation of a nation and its sovereign state because even at the time of statelessness, the Poles “retained a high national spirit” (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1812, 22 Juillet).

In general, in terms of culture and society, the main attribute is traditionalism, which is stipulated by the ancient state (texts from 1806–1807), the religiosity of the population and the traditional social structure of the society. Society was divided into unequal strata, in particular – the *szlachta* and peasants. The Poles are perceived as partly civilized, partly barbarians – they seek to join a progressive Western (of course, the French model) society, but to achieve this they still had to overcome the remnants of barbarism.

## 5. Image: Uprising

It is also important to consider discourse about the uprising and the support of Napoleon’s plans by the Poles because in this context we see the formation of two images – France and Poland, “savior” and “saved”. The Uprising theme began with an article in 1805, which refers to the “dim unrest” in Poland (“Journal de l’Empire”, 1805, 04 Décembre). The text refers to letters from the front, in which it is written that “there were about 10 thousand [Poles] who had joined other divisions” (“Journal

de l'Empire", 1805, 27 Août). This is just one example of statements about the support from the population. The authors of articles write about the right of Poles to defend their own nation, to sacrifice their own lives.

Also, there are many articles about the successes of the French army in the fight for the independence of Poland. In 1809 we read: "Our brave army continues to cover itself with glory. On the night 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> our troops took over the fortress of Zamość" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1809, 14 Juin). In addition to the French troops, the Polish squads that participated in the uprising are also mentioned: "All Polish military divisions united with the army of Prince Poniatowski" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1809, 23 Juillet). Continuation of the subject of the uprising in Poland and the illustration of France's messiah role, we find in further texts devoted to the military victories ("Journal de l'Empire", 1806, 19 Novembre; 1809, 23 Juillet; 1809, 14 Juin; 1806, 28 Novembre).

Among the texts on the uprising, we see the formation of the image of the imperial troops and France as the liberators of the Polish people: "Poles contribute to the efforts of the liberators" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1806, 02 Décembre); "Warszawa [people] address the liberators of Poland" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1806, 03 Décembre), "people come from everywhere to see their liberators" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1806, 28 Novembre). When the French troops entered Poznań, the residents welcomed them with exclamations: "Vivat Emperor Napoleon! Vivat liberators!" ("Journal de l'Empire", 1806, 11 Décembre). So, the image was created of French being a "messiah", in relation to Poland. Information is presented so that French would feel like saviors. And such a role was attractive since it placed them at a higher civilization level than the Poles.

We also would like to draw your attention to yet another text about the victorious French army, which with help from Poles deprived the Russian Empire of the territories of Poland, which it annexed because of the divisions of Poland (1807, 22 Février). Consequently, we see the pursuit of French interests in the weakening of the Russian Empire, which was a consistent member of the Anti-French coalitions.

If we are talking about the Uprising it is also appropriate to mention that some elements of the *image* was constructed with the help of the native inhabitants of the region – Poles (Ададуров, 2008), who moved to France after the Third Partition of Poland. And we will pay our attention

to the texts written by Poles, that were printed in “Journal de l’Empire”. Few of them were written by the prominent Polish statesman Jan Henryk Dąbrowski (issue of 1806, 12 Décembre). He came to Paris in 1796 (Зашкільняк, Крикун, 2002. 263–264) and played a crucial role in creating Polish Legions (also known as *Dąbrowski Legions*) in 1797 (Lerski, 1996. 104). This and some other articles, which were reprinted from Poznań (1812, 16 Juillet) and Warsaw (1807, 21 Janvier) newspapers, claimed overall support of the French troops, if they come into Poland and help to regain independence; also Poles abroad were called to unite into Legions and help Napoleon<sup>2</sup>. Texts of Polish authors were printed to show virtue of French, who answered a call to help the stateless nation. Even though this is just one aspect of complex political background – it is also the only “visible” one in the analyzed source. In relation to this, I want to point out that general background of Poles in France during the researched period is well-known and better described in other scholarly works, that is why we are not talking about it in particular, only in connection with the research theme.

In conclusion, it is interesting to note that during 1807–1812 the newspaper portrayed a very optimistic picture: the success of the French army, more and more Poles support the uprising and unite with the French troops, overall support of Napoleon and France in Poland. For the French, this served confirmation that they were right, and propagated the policy of the government of Napoleon I among readers of the newspaper.

## 6. Conclusion

Publication of the articles about Poland begins at the same time as the First Polish War (1806–1807). The French “discover” this territory, through studies by Claude Carloman de Rulhière and Conrad Malte-Brun, who were describing the history, climate, geography, and population of Poland.

We can outline the fact that at first Poland is not regarded as a separate state, but only as a part of hostile empires. Further, the image of the Poles

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<sup>2</sup>This Legions were indeed formed and took part in several military campaigns, mainly in Italy and later Haiti (Зашкільняк, Крикун, 2002, 263).

is separated from the empires to justify Napoleon's intervention in matters outside France and show the need for foreign military campaigns. Poland is depicted as unfairly suppressed by Russia and Prussia, a state with long-standing and strong democratic traditions which deserves independence. There were descriptions of ancient statehood in several issues of the newspaper and anonymous authors of articles were delighted – they wrote that this country needed help from France because strong imperial neighbors suppressed Polish people, and the Poles did not manage to “liberate” themselves. France is depicted here as a “savior” and “liberator”. Napoleon I, in his appeals on the pages of the newspaper, emphasizes that Poland needs help from France in the struggle for independence. He proves the historical necessity of the existence of a separate Polish state, which the Poles deserve, and proclaims the existence of the “Polish nation”.

In the discourse on the uprising, we see two images – Poland and France. The image of France was formed in relation to the image of Poland. In general, it can be noted that the myth of the messianism of the French people was formed, which is important in the context of representations of Poland. This can be described as a thesis-antithesis because it is much easier to show primitiveness as an opposite to the civilization. We see France as the liberator, the savior of the oppressed, which carries a mission to civilize. Such an image of France serves the basis for a condescending view of Poland and its inhabitants, and gives the opportunity to justify intervention in order to enlighten and help a weaker suppressed country. In general, the image of France can be described as civilized, which fits into the context of the Enlightenment.

In cultural terms, the image of the population of Poland is depicted as very pious. Catholicism has a profound influence on the society and is an integral part of everyday life of the Poles. All celebrations begin with a festive mass, and the information is distributed through parishes.

The analysis of the source allows to partially reconstruct the image of a Pole, who is somewhat civilized, it is not characterized as a barbarian. We see a citizen of Poland as a religious but enlightened *szlachtych* in urban space.

We need to consider also lack of some categories of information in the source. For example, there is little information about the culture, there are not many texts about the population, its social strata, and the economic

situation. Such a small number, in turn, is also a source of information, as it indicates that these categories were either considered unimportant or deliberately concealed from readers. Since the government was the main supplier of the information that was printed, and dictated what had to be covered in publications, it can be concluded that Poland's image was favorable for Napoleon I. Poland was depicted in such a way as to justify military intervention to the country for achieving military and political goals.

In general, the texts show the language of the Enlightenment in relation to Poland: civilization and barbarism, traditional nature of the society – religiosity of the population and stratification; Poland is described as an agrarian country in need of assistance from the civilized France; as a country experiencing the childhood and youth of the nation.

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